

Rede von Torsten Burmester, Oberbürgermeister der Stadt Köln anlässlich des Besuches der Oberbürgermeisterin der Stadt Rotterdam, Carola Schouten, am 14. April 2026 im Historischen Rathaus zu Köln

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort!

Distinguished Mayor of Rotterdam, dear Ms Schouten,

Distinguished Ms Consul General Tijmes,

dear delegation members: hartelijk welkom in Keulen!

I would also like to welcome:

- The chief of police, Mr Hermanns,
- The city council members,
- Dr. Janssen, CEO of our economic development agency KölnBusiness,
- and Ms Pedersen, Equal Opportunity Office

Dear friends from Rotterdam, we are gathered here today in Cologne's historic town hall. Although it may be hard to imagine in this room, Cologne's town hall is the oldest in Germany.

It was built during the heyday of a society that owed its prosperity to trade. And with that, we have already arrived at the heart of the shared history of our two cities, Ms Schouten:

Cologne and Rotterdam have been linked by close trade relations for centuries. For a long time, the Port of Rotterdam was Cologne's most important sea harbour – down the Rhine to Rotterdam – Cologne's gateway to the world! This special relationship between our two cities was deeply severed by the

Second World War. The darkest time in European history for which the Germans bear responsibility.

German bombs devastated Rotterdam. Allied bombs destroyed Cologne. This, too, is a sad similarity between our cities. We can still take pride in the fact that this history did not divide us. Instead, the Netherlands and Germany sought reconciliation. We established a shared remembrance. And did everything in our power to prevent another war.

I am grateful to the political leaders of the postwar era, that they realized: friends do not go to war with one another.

This led to the establishment of town twinning schemes – driven by the citizens of both cities. Rotterdam and Cologne came together in 1958 – and sealed their friendship in a new Europe. In a Europe that supports, helps, advises and inspires one another. In a Europe where what unites us matters more than what divides us. Alongside the Rhine, we are now connected by motorways and a rail cargo route that is central to Europe's economy.

We are connected by pipelines. We are connected by the vision of supplying industry with sustainable energy from the Rotterdam Energy Hub and developing the Rhine into a climate-friendly transport corridor.

What became true 68 years ago is still true: We can – and we should learn from one and another as sister cities! Housing shortages, public safety and cleanliness as well as economic issues in the face of a new global disorder. In all these areas,

we can come up with better solutions, when we work together!
To this end, we intend to cooperate even more closely. Today,
we are not only declaring this shared commitment but also
setting it out in a Letter of Intent, which we will sign immediately
afterwards.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are united by shared interests.

But we are also united by convictions!

Rotterdam and Cologne are cities with centuries-old civil
societies. Societies in which early forms of democracy
emerged. Today, it is clear to us: Our democracy is under
pressure. Particularly because populists would have us believe
that there are simple solutions to complex challenges.

As cities that are closer to the people than any other level of
government, we must restore trust in our states and in
democracy – and I am convinced that the best way to do so is
by solving problems. And I believe that your visit, dear mayor
Schouten, can promote such solutions.

To all our guests from Rotterdam, I would like to say:

Thank you very much for honouring us with your presence. I
wish us all inspiring discussions that will deepen our friendship.

Dank u wel und Dankeschön!